

*Bird Health Briefs:*



**ANOREXIA**

**AND**

**LETHARGY**

## **General information**

Anorexia (a loss of appetite), and lethargy (a feeling of listlessness and general inactivity), are commonly seen in sick pet birds. While not diagnostic for any specific disease, they do indicate a severely ill bird that requires immediate medical attention.

### **What are the causes of anorexia and lethargy in birds?**

There are many causes of anorexia and lethargy in pet birds. These include *cancer, viral or bacterial infections, fungal or yeast infections, parasites, endocrine or hormonal diseases, and organ specific problems such as liver, heart or kidney failure*. Some diseases such as proventricular dilatation do not have a known cause but can produce the signs of anorexia and lethargy. Anorexia and lethargy are not diseases themselves but indicate a serious underlying medical problem.

### **Do I have to take my bird to the vet immediately, or can I just "wait and watch" and see if he improves?**

Unlike dogs and cats, birds are still "wild" pets. This means that they still retain their preservation response. The preservation response is something unique to wild animals. In the wild, an animal can't "act sick" every time he feels bad. If it did, it might be killed by a predator or even a member of his own group. The preservation response assures that a sick animal will not "act sick" until it is really sick, and literally dying. Birds rarely get sick overnight. Because of their preservation response, they don't usually act sick until they are

really sick. Therefore, a bird with anorexia and lethargy is **EXTREMELY ILL** and requires **IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION**. Waiting and watching will only make things worse; you may actually wait and watch as your bird dies.

## **How will the vet determine what's wrong with my bird?**

Because many diseases can cause the signs of anorexia and lethargy, many diagnostic tests will need to be run. These can include blood tests, gram stains and cultures, faecal tests for parasites, yeast, and bacteria, radiographs (X-rays), and a psittacosis test among others. There is no one test to diagnose the many causes of anorexia and lethargy.

## **The vet recommended hospitalisation for my bird. Is that really necessary?**

By the time many birds are seen by the vet, they are literally dying. If your vet recommends hospitalisation, it is because your bird requires the type of critical care that cannot be given at home.

## **How are birds with anorexia and lethargy treated?**

Treatment obviously varies with the cause of the anorexia and lethargy. In general, many of these birds are extremely ill. Hospitalisation in an incubator, fluid therapy, force feeding, and broad spectrum antibiotic therapy are usually indicated. If the specific cause of the illness is determined, then medications used to treat the specific cause will be given as well.

## **Can I prevent any of the causes of anorexia and lethargy?**

Yes! First, make sure you feed your bird properly. An all-seed diet, predisposes birds to many of the causes of anorexia and lethargy. Second, all birds need an annual examination and laboratory tests. Often, abnormalities are discovered during these "routine" visits. When discovered early, treatment is usually easy and inexpensive. There's no need to wait until your bird is on death's door before he sees the vet. By spending just a little money each year, you can detect diseases early and prolong your bird's life.